The Quiet Corner

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PUTNAM TRAVELER

Supporting Tourism & Communities in Northeastern, CT & Beyond...

ISSUE NO. 62 • NORTHEASTERN, CONNECTICUT

DOWNTOWN MAP INSIDE • APRIL - JUNE 2019

For an afternoon, a day, or a weekend...come and enjoy Northeastern Connecticut!

Chrissy Peckham Photography

Spring in northeastern Connecticut offers a so much to see and do; scenic drives, outdoor recreational activities, special events, unique shops and exceptional eateries! ***First Fridays*** (downtown Putnam) begins in May and is held the first Friday of each month through October, this year the theme is ***Made in America! The Downtown Putnam Fairy Festival*** will be held on April 13th and the ***Memorial Day Parade*** is May 27th. See in the inside front cover for a full listing of events. In this issue we feature some very special and unique businesses including ***Adriaenz Auctions***, ***Farm to Table Market***, ***NEPS*** and so much more. Please tell our advertisers you found them here. To view past issues of the Putnam Traveler ***visit www.putnamtraveler.com***.

INSIDE:

Local Advertisers...Downtown Putnam Events...This issue of the ***Putnam Traveler*** features...***The Quiet Corner Inn***... this family run Inn located in Brooklyn offers quality accomodations and personal service...learn more about owner ***Manny Patel*** and his family and make this your next destination for an overnight in the Quiet Corner! ***Jabbar Mowaish*** is hard at work at his retirement project... he has transformed ***Vineyard Valley Golf Club*** from an overgrown and ailing private club into an attractive and popular public golf venue...the club is open to the public and their prices can't be beat...***Farm to Table Market*** is family run by the Peckham Family (6 & 7th generation farmers) offers fresh farm milk in glass bottles, farm-grown meat and pork and Tulmeadow Farm ice-cream in season...worth the trip to Dugg Hill in Woodstock! Find health & wellbeing at ***Block 134***...located in downtown Putnam...The Block 134 community features a variety of services including: yoga, reiki, lectures, art therapy, art classes a WIFI lounge, healthy snacks, local hand-made gifts and so much more! This beautiful space is also available for rent for your next party or special event.... ***Adriaenz Auctions*** comes to Putnam...held on Saturday... check out their weekly auctions, this is truly a unique experience...And discover ***Symphony Flower Farm***... the perfect source for seasonal plants, fresh flowers & vegetables, dried flower wreaths and other decor and gift items...all provided by ***The Day Program at Northeast Placement Services (NEPS).***

Downtown Putnam & Area Maps • Businesses • Local Activities • Shopping & Events

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- Visit Connecticut

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2019 EVENTS

Sat, Feb 9th:	Fire and Ice Festival, 12-9pm
Sun, March 10th:	Courthouse O' Putnam 5k
Sat, April 13th:	The Downtown Fairy Festival, 11am-6pm
Fri, May 3rd:	First Fridays, 5-9pm
Sun, May 5th:	Fishing Derby, Rotary Park, 12-3pm
Mon, May 27th:	Memorial Day Parade, 10am
Fri, June 7th:	First Fridays, 5-9pm
Sat, June 8th:	Particle Accelerator, A Benefit Festival - United Services
Fri, July 5th:	First Fridays, 5-9pm
Sat, July 6th:	Fireworks, 9:15 pm, Rain Date July 7th EWCB, 4:00-5:30pm, THE BIG BLUE THANG, 7:15-9:15pm
Sat, July 13th	Day Kimball Hospital 125th Anniversary Celebration, Rotary Park 7-8:30pm, RiverFire, 8:30-10pm
Fri, Aug 2nd:	First Fridays, 5-9pm
Fri, Aug 9th:	"THE VOICE" AL FRESCO, Rotary Park, 7-8:30pm, RiverFire, 8:30-10:00pm
Sat, Aug 10th:	Walk and Race for the NE CT Cancer Fund of DKH, 9:05am
Sun, Aug 18th:	Main Street Car Cruise & Arc Duck Race, 10:30am-4pm
Fri, Sept 6th:	First Fridays, 5-9pm
Sat, Sept 7th:	BILLY PILGRIM, Rotary Park, 6-7:30pm "Light Up Putnam Fundraiser Event," RiverFire, 7:30-9pm
Sun, Sept 8th:	Savor the Flavor "Pasta" A Food Tasting & Concert, Rotary Park, 12-3pm
Fri, Oct 4th:	First Fridays, 5-9pm
Fri, Oct 18th:	Zombie Fashion Show, Rotary Park
Sat, Oct 19th:	The Great Pumpkin Festival, 10am-3:30pm
Fri, Oct 25th:	Trick or Treat on Main Street, 5-7pm
Fri, Nov 29th:	Santa Comes to Town, Rotary Park, 4pm Black Friday - Holiday Stroll
Sun, Dec 1st:	Holiday Dazzle Light Parade, 5pm, Rain Date Dec 8th
Fri, Dec 6th:	Gingerbread House and Ugly Sweater - Holiday Stroll
Fri, Dec 13th:	Stocking Stuffer - Holiday Stroll
Fri, Dec 20th:	Procrastinators - Holiday Stroll

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May 3 - American Sports
June 7 - American Music
July 5 - Theme Parks & Animation
August 2 - Happy 50th Woodstock
September 6 - Celebrating ComiCon
October 5 - Steam Punk
(A Retro Futurism Party)

BEAUTIFICATION DAY
APRIL 27, 2019

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8:30 am
Gather at Rotary Park
to Receive Cleaning Assignments

11:00 am
Return to Rotary Park

11:00 am-12:00 pm
Volunteer Appreciation Lunch

RAIN DATE: MAY 4, 2019

*Funded in part by The Last Green Valley and The Town of Putnam.

Quiet Corner Inn Offers Quality Accomodations

Manny Patel, owner of the Quiet Corner Inn in Brooklyn, is as enthusiastic about his community and his business as any person one might meet. With a degree in business administration and an outgoing personality, Patel, a native of western India, knew from childhood that what he wanted to do as a career. Some of his direction came from his family. His father owned a motel in Foxboro, Massachusetts, and relatives owned another property in Rocky Hill. As Manny traveled between the two places as a teenager, he spotted his current establishment, and promised that one day he would buy it. He kept his word.

BY NANCY P. WEISS

Manny Patel, owner of the Quiet Corner Inn in Brooklyn, is as enthusiastic about his community and his business as any person one might meet. With a degree in business administration and an outgoing personality, Patel, a native of western India, knew from childhood that what he wanted to do as a career. Some of his direction came from his family. His father owned a motel in Foxboro, Massachusetts, and relatives owned another property in Rocky Hill. As Manny traveled between the two places as a teenager, he spotted his current establishment, and promised that one day he would buy it. He kept his word.

In 1999 the Quiet Corner Inn opened its doors, following a complete renovation. With 18 rooms in the front of the establishment featuring king beds, coffee makers, microwaves, refrigerators and access to washer-dryers and 8 rooms on the back outfitted with two Queen beds and the same amenities, the inn has been a continuous success. Part of the appeal in addition to quality housekeeping and comfortable furnishings is price.

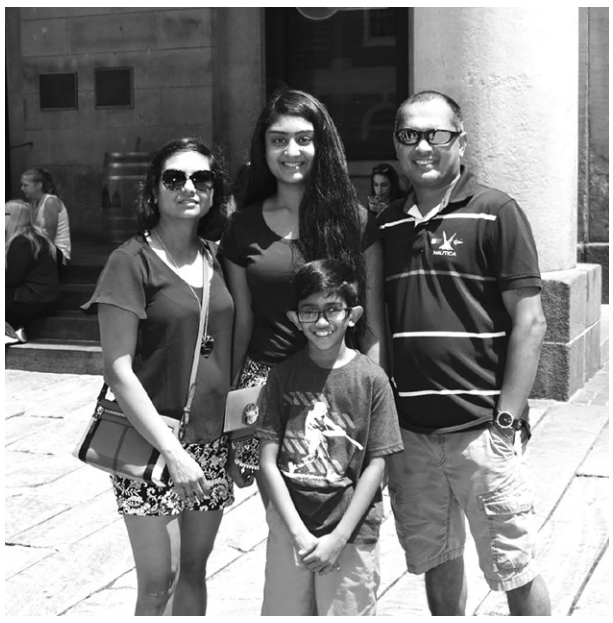
"Our rate is very competitive. Right now it is $75 per night. We don't raise the price when there are weather issues. We serve parents visiting private schools in the area as well as people coming for weddings. We are completely booked on the weekends from June to October. Many of our customers are repeat visitors, who come every year to see relatives at nearby senior living centers as well as to attend events at Thompson Speedway. We are also not far from the casinos," Manny said.

Quiet Corner Inn is highly rated on a variety of internet sites. It rates at 4.5-5 by well-known companies such as Trip Advisor and Expdia.com. Clientele write positive reviews about the property and comment often on Patel's welcoming attitude and willingness to do whatever he can to make their visit a good one. In the summer he sets up gas grills and chairs so that his clients can enjoy backyard entertaining, something one would not expect to find at a typical motor inn.

Although breakfast is not included in the cost of a room, guests are given restaurant vouchers for nearby eateries such as the Country View Restaurant and Dunkin' Donuts.

A few years ago, the crew of a Hollywood movie, "Serial Buddies," stayed at the Inn. Actor Maria Menounos grew up in the area and spent several weeks filming in various locations, adding a brush with stardom to the Inn's cachet.

The Patel family are committed to their community almost as much as they are to the Inn. Manny is a member of the Brooklyn Business Association, the Danielson Chamber of Commerce and supports The Last Green Valley as a business partner. He is enthusiastic about helping other area entrepreneurs and enjoys hosting an annual picnic at the Inn for members of the Brooklyn Business Association featuring Indian food.



In addition to his love of community and serving his guests, Manny and his family are passionate about traveling. Last spring, the Patel's went to Punta Cana and The Dominican Republic. In the summer, they made a trip to Mexico and the west coast where they explored the Grand Canyon, Lake Havasu and Las Vegas. Their winter vacation included a six-week trip to three countries including: Dubai (UAE), India and Sri Lanka. "The entire trip was for my kids," Manny says proudly. "My son Sai (12 years old) has always wanted to go to India to see the Taj Mahal. That trip was for him. My Daughter Ayana (a Premed student at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences) always wanted to go to Dubai (United Arab Emirates) to see world's tallest building and Dubai/Abu Dhabi city. That trip was for her. And we attended a wedding in India, I wanted my kids to experience Indian culture. It was a trip of a lifetime," said Manny.

"I am passionate about traveling, photography and my family. I have had so many amazing opportunities to see the world; there's always something new to see, something different, something so exciting that it leaves me wanting more. Family travel is not all sunshine and rainbows, but it gives us so many great experiences and amazing memories, and it's absolutely worth it!"

In an increasingly anonymous world, the Quiet Corner Inn in Brooklyn is a pleasant oasis of personal interaction. The Patel family work at the Inn and maintain high standards of cleanliness and efficiency, but they also engage with their clientele to make them feel welcome, cared for and assisted in whatever way necessary to make their stay in northeastern Connecticut a pleasant one. Perhaps, that is the key to so many comments on travel review sites – Manny Patel and his family make staying at the Quiet Corner Inn something special.

The Quiet Corner Inn is located at 479 Providence Road, Route 6, Brooklyn, CT. (860)774-9644. www.quietcornerinn.com and find them on Facebook

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A NEW ERA FOR Vineyard Valley Golf Club

Even with snow on the ground in March, Jabbar Mowaish is hard at work at his retirement project, a golf course in Pomfret. This outgoing, energetic Quiet Corner resident loves the sport and his enthusiasm is contagious. His authentic, high-wattage smile makes one feel immediately at home. It's no wonder that in less than two years, he has transformed Vineyard Valley Golf Club from an overgrown and ailing private club into an attractive and popular public golf venue.

BY CRIS CADIZ

Vineyard Valley Golf Club (VVGC) is located on 70 scenic acres on the site of the former Hamlet Hill Winery in Pomfret. It was designed and built by prominent local businessman Gus Loos as a private golf course for his family and friends. The first 5 holes of the golf course were installed in 1985 and nine holes were completed by 1990. Situated on a long rolling hillside, the land is flanked by woods on one side, by Route 244 on the other, and overseen by the Loos family home, an elegant gray contemporary known locally as "The Castle." Course of play runs from the clubhouse at the bottom of the hill, zig zags up to and circles the Castle, and then heads back down. Panoramic views of Pomfret's bucolic countryside are lovely in every season. The course spans 3,033 yards and features two par three holes, two par five holes, and five par four holes. There are also a driving range (where you can whack balls for as little as $4!) and two practice greens.

Jabbar retired as a regional Vice President in 2012, having worked for Walmart for thirty years. He became a managing partner at Brooklyn Country Club and Golf Course on South Street in Brooklyn, where he was also a member. Jabbar has been a golfer for more than 25 years. "I used to play everywhere. I kept my clubs in the car because I traveled all over the northeast," he says. When asked how he likes running a business in his retirement, he replies enthusiastically, "I love to do this because it's a hobby. What better hobby is there than golf!?"

Photos courtesy of Vineyard Valley Golf Club

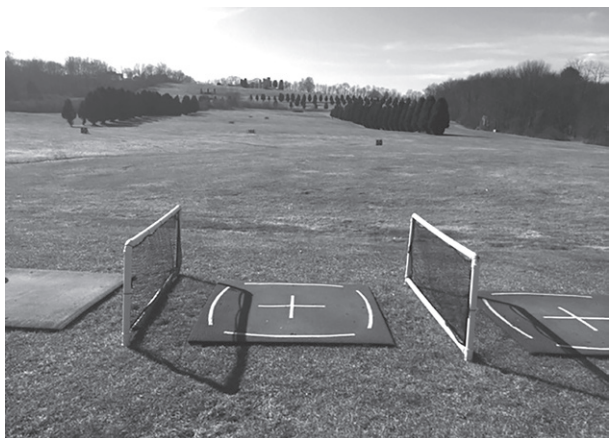
After just one year, Jabbar took over the partnership in Brooklyn and ran the venue by himself for another four years. The Brooklyn Club closed and the property was sold at the end of 2017 and Jabbar set his sights on Vineyard Valley Golf Club. He assumed the lease and management in Pomfret in November 2017. "When I took over there were only 50 members," he says. "Last year I ended up with 250 members, and that's my goal for 2019." The closing of the Brooklyn Country Club was a mixed blessing. "It was good news for me since most of the members there followed me here to Pomfret," says Jabbar, who confidently adds, "because our customer service is top of the line!"

Novice golfer Michelle Benton, who starting playing at VVGC last fall, agrees. "We are so lucky to have VVGC in our backyard," she says. "As a women entering the sport, I was excited to see the club had several women's golf clinics...so I could learn the game and meet other female golfers at the same time. Derrick Saddler, their golf pro, has made learning the sport a fun and rewarding experience. What a turnaround this course has had since Jabbar has taken ownership. He brought in the right team to elevate the course and provide a welcoming environment!"

Avid golfer Tom Leard has been a member of VVGC since 2007 and is pleased with the transition. "Jabbar and his crew make everyone feel welcome. The clubhouse is full of equipment and beverages. He also cleaned up the course and brought back the family atmosphere; it makes it fun to come down and play or just hang out."

When he took over, Jabbar set about investing money, effort and vision into the course, which had seen better days. The work he put into upgrading just about everything was noted by Golf Advisor Magazine, in its "Top 25 Most Improved U.S. Golf Courses" list last year. Golf Advisor ranked Vineyard Valley Golf Club 15 out of 25 in the entire nation for course improvement in 2018. Jabbar didn't even know the publication had bestowed this accolade, and heard about it from a member. He is understandably thrilled at the recognition of his efforts.

One of the reviews on GolfAdvisor.com was titled "A little gem." This golfer offered his assessment: "We really did not know what to expect and we loved what we saw. Who would have thought you could pack such a fun par 36 on a hill with such diversity and so challenging? The view from 7 is just amazing. Worth every penny. One last



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thing, right from the start you feel welcome, which is not always the case with golf courses, but you do here...great staff – thanks."

Jabbar points out to me the many places he has lavished attention on his course. He made many landscape improvements for aesthetics but also to make play easier (such as finding errant golf balls). "The course was a mess," he divulges. "We spent a lot of money and labor just to clean things up." His workers trimmed and sculpted 185 evergreen trees that now march in precise and tidy rows along the hillside. "My people came in and over two months they kept chopping and chopping... it looks so beautiful." He also tidied up four small ponds by the clubhouse, which were completely overgrown and hidden with brush and weeds. "It's a nice course with a lot of differences and diff pars. We tried to make it very professional and challenging but not difficult."

He also renovated the clubhouse, turning a porch-like storage space into a pro shop well stocked with brand name merchandise. It features a long wooden bar where golfers and guests can enjoy beer and wine. Last year, Jabbar purchased 25 brand new golf carts. "The old carts were electric and broken everywhere. People would get stuck up on the hill," he says chuckling a bit. "These poor guys, they would come walking all the way down, not too happy." Jabbar is also pleased to have golf professional Derrick Sadeller on staff to teach lessons. "He loves to help beginners."

The latest improvement, ready for the 2019 season, is the addition of Sugar & Smoke, a popular takeout BBQ restaurant from Putnam. Jabbar doubled the size of the kitchen and dining room and has leased the restaurant to Darrell Minkler and Elizabeth Wolter, who pride themselves on making all their food from scratch. They are happy to now have a location where people can sit and enjoy their meals. Entrees include Smoked Brisket every Friday and Smoked Spare Ribs every Thursday and Saturday. Other entrees include pulled pork and chicken or pork carnitas, plus homemade sides, salads and desserts, and there are always daily specials. Sugar & Smoke opened at VVGC with a limited schedule in February but will update their hours when the weather improves and the golf course starts its season.

Everything at Vineyard Valley Golf Club is open to the public, including playing nine holes (or twice for 18), using the driving range and eating at Sugar & Smoke. VVGC is open 7 days a week, with unlimited golf for members. Hours are 6AM till last customer leaves. Jabbar suggests the golfers call on weekends for tee times but can probably walk in to play on week days. VVGC also offers men's and women's leagues, plus events such as the 4th of July and Memorial Day Tournaments and the Turkey Shoot, with a Thanksgiving-style meal and competition. The course usually opens for the season in early April, but if the weather cooperates, as soon as mid-March.

Jabbar urges people to check out his course, citing great value, excellent customer service and the many improvements as reasons to come. "Our prices are the least expensive in the area; nobody can compete with us," he says. "It's fun and social," he says. "Your spouse can play and then you can meet for food & drink after." After being a VP in major corporation, Jabbar is thoroughly enjoying his golf club venture. "To be honest it's less stress," he says. "When you have a new business you have to be here. I work 6 days a week but I'm the boss," he adds. "Hopefully this year I can play more. People love when they see me here. They come more often." I leave with a friendly smile from Jabbar and a wish that I had time to try a new sport!

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All photos by Chrissy Peckham Photography

Farm to Table Market

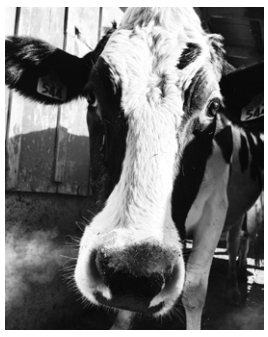
Step in to Elm Farm's newest venture, Farm to Table Market, and enjoy a variety of sensations. The tidy, attractive store is filled to the brim with interesting items that hew tightly to the theme of locally grown or locally made. Look out the windows of the shop and see clean, contented Holsteins so close you can almost smell their soft, grain-soaked breath. For a moment it is possible to feel as if you are in the middle of the herd, while reaching for a shiny glass bottle filled with milk from the very same cows.

BY NANCY P. WEISS

Farm to Table Market is the result of much thought and the considerable combined talents of the Peckham family, sixth and seventh generation farmers in Woodstock. Matt and Chrissy Peckham and their four children live in an antique home, filled with items from Matt's family. Everyone is involved in the farm and the market, with eldest son, Caleb, a student in the Killingly Agricultural Education Program, especially engaged.

"I started farming as soon as I could walk. I helped feed the calves, ride on the tractor and sit with my father in the milk room. As I grew older, I took on other duties and now I help milk one-hundred and fifty cows every Wednesday and Saturday. In the summer the farm is really busy with crops and hay in addition to milking and the market," said 17 year-old Caleb, who is also President of the Windham County 4-H Fair and a leader in the 4-H club program.

Chrissy Peckham manages to juggle to responsibilities of family life with running the market. A native of Plainfield with a degree in Early Childhood Education, she grew up spending summers at her family's Vermont farm, where she and her siblings helped out. There she developed an appreciation for the simplicity



of farm life that she continues to value despite the many demands on her time.

"I try to keep our life centered. The children and I walk the laneways in the summer and look after the baby animals. I am proud that Matt is a farmer. He and I wanted to raise children on the farm. They like to watch their father work and join in as much as they can. Now we need to find ways to make the farm sustainable for the future," she said.

The Peckhams sell their milk through a dairy cooperative, Agri-Mark, which includes Cabot and McCadam cheeses. Though the organization, they learned more about marketing and participated in educational programs to teach the general public more about farming and food production. The farm hosts school field trips, 4-H meetings and practice sessions and participates in Last Green Valley's Walktober. They knew, however that to remain viable they needed to do more.

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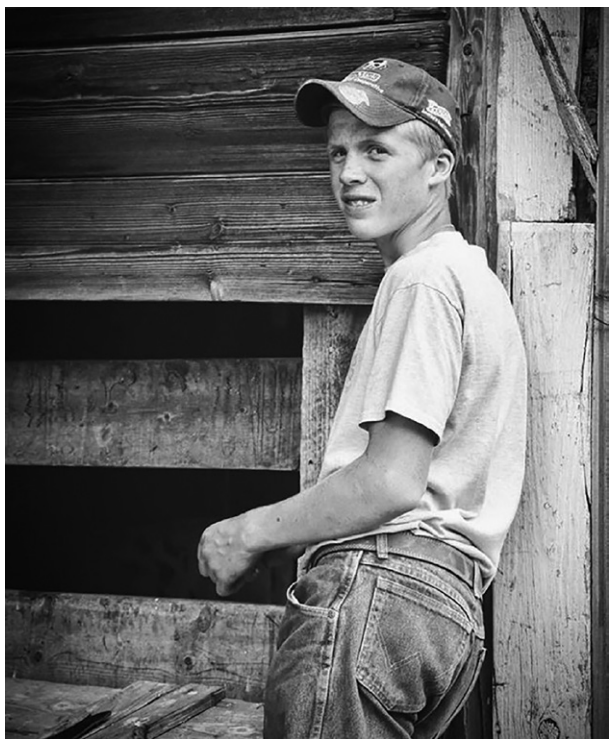
"We took a leap of faith and opened Farm to Table Market. Matt wanted to sell our milk directly from the farm in glass bottles, as his great grandfather, Clayton Peckham, had done. We revived the logo of the farm and put it on the bottles and caps. My creative juices began to flow and we designed a place where we could bring local people and farmers together and foster healthier eating," Chrissy added.

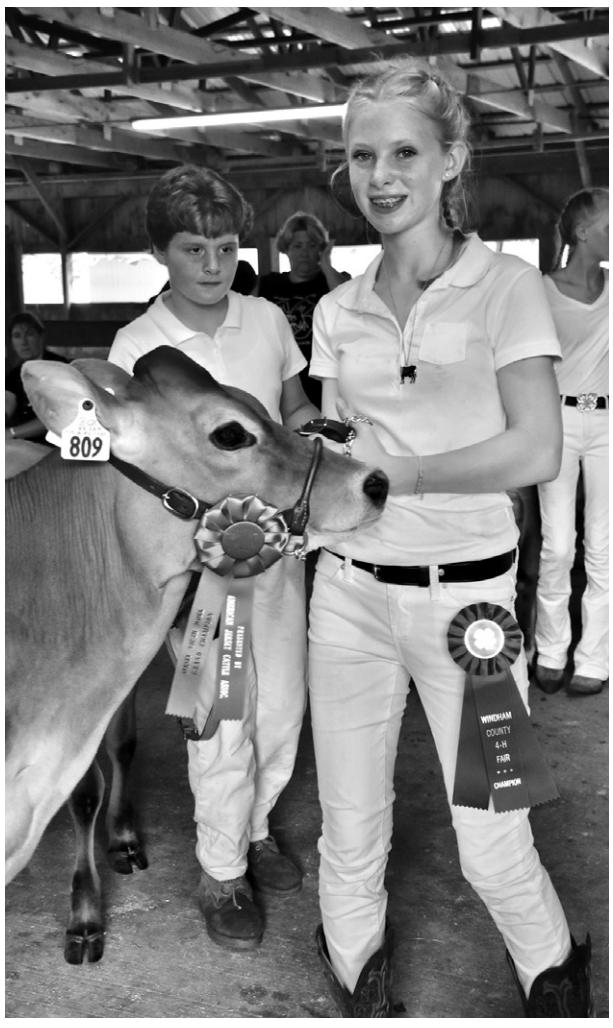
Every Thursday Matthew loads milk from the bulk tank at Elm Farm and brings it to a creamery in Massachusetts where it is bottled in approximately two hours. The milk is then brought back to Woodstock to the market. Because the milk was gathered at night and includes milk from Jersey cows as well as Holsteins, it is thicker and creamier. The cows standing contentedly behind the farm stand produced the product for sale in the coolers.

The market offers much more than milk as there is a wide variety of items, selected by Chrissy to help a customer find enough ingredients in one stop to put a meal together.

They sell whole milk and chocolate milk in sparkling glass 1/2 gallons as well as quart sizes of whole, and coffee milk. Locally grown honey, spices, maple syrup, micro-greens, garlic, homeopathy products, cheeses, yogurt, bakery products, ice cream and meat make up a large portion of the offerings. In the spring and summer vegetables from the farm and other local growers will be added to the mix.

Almost as significant as the milk, however, is the assortment of meat products on sale in the shiny coolers that cover one wall. All the pork and beef sold in the store is grown on the farm. Matthew Peckham manages all of the meat production and oversees the processing. He raises the animals and carefully chooses how the meat will be handled. A specialty butcher in the Boston area makes the bacon and sausages, including kielbasa, which are nitrate free. The pork chops, roasts and spare ribs are also nitrate free. Beef and pork, including specialty cuts, smoked hams and holiday roasts add to the mix. A "tomahawk steak", a substantial piece of beef on the rib bone, is ideal for grilling and sells out quickly.



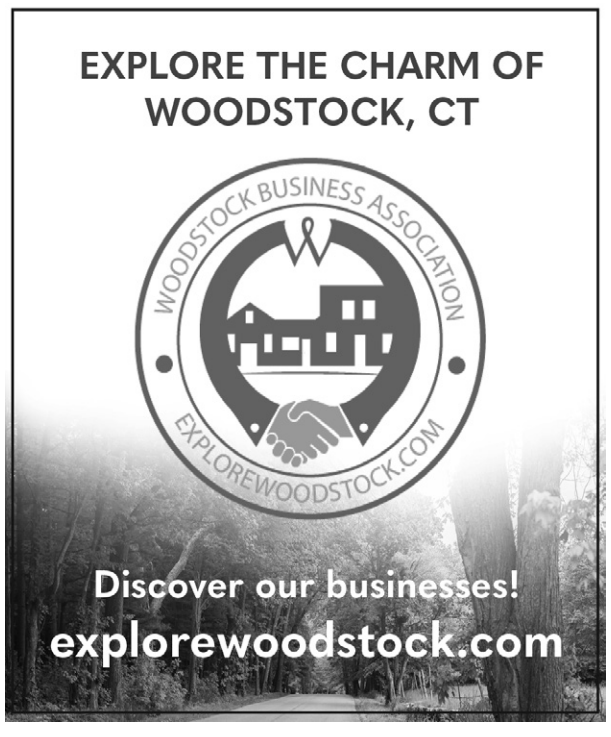


The concept of Farm to Table led to a catchy name and a set of guiding principles for stocking the market, but it also represents the Peckham's determination to maintain their farm and create a base for their children to continue the business and the lifestyle.

"So often farming is hammering out the bottom line numbers, which are often discouraging. Milk prices have been stagnant for years and we knew we needed to diversity. The market puts us in touch everyday with customers who tell us how much they like our products and value what we do. It is very encouraging," Chrissy Peckham added.

Farm to Table Market will be scooping ice cream beginning in April. Tulmeadow Farm in West Simsbury makes the ice cream which has 16 percent butterfat and a variety of traditional and special flavors. It proved to be very popular as soon as the market opened. Lines of enthusiastic customers are likely in warm weather.

Farm to Table Market is open every day from 10-6:30 in winter and 10-9pm in summer. It is located at 137 Dugg Hill Road, East Woodstock. Follow them on Facebook and Instagram at Farm to Table.



Find Health and Wellbeing at Block 134

What is Block 134? Stop by to find out! This venue at #134 Main Street in Downtown Putnam is located across the street from the Courthouse Restaurant. The trip up a flight of stairs to this hidden gem is well worth it. You will emerge into an open, airy space with high ceilings, abundant natural light, exposed brick walls and a scenic view of Cargill Falls from the back of the building. Artwork is everywhere... from an ever-changing display in all media in two large gallery spaces, to artistically arranged jewelry, pottery, glass and other hand crafts for sale in the community lounge.

BY CRIS CADIZ

Photos courtesy of Block 134

This comfy central space features café style tables and other décor crafted from reclaimed wood. Here one can sit and work using free WiFi or enjoy a conversation and a hot beverage from the tea bar. A private services office hosts sessions with a variety of health practitioners, including art therapy, mental health counseling, nutrition and integrative health, reiki, reflexology, and more. There is art studio space for workshops and classes. Yoga practice is held at least 6 times a week. Block 134 is also home to two art gallery spaces: Silver Circle Gallery and Pomfret School Gallery.

Basically, Block 134 is a one-stop-shop for health and wellbeing, which you can discover there through movement, art, nutrition, alternative health services or simply enjoying an attractive and comfortable venue quietly by yourself or with friends, family and colleagues. Most importantly, Block 134 is intended to offer community space–a place where people with similar needs, passions or just curiosity can gather to explore, create and be well.

The designer and coordinator of all these good things is local entrepreneur, artist and Integrative Health & Nutrition Practitioner Carly Sage, who still curates Silver Circle Gallery within the Block 134 space. Carly was integral to Downtown Putnam's revitalization, which started about when she opened Silver Circle Gallery 10 years ago. As part of a core group of creative, energetic small business owners, Carly helped found First Fridays, which has grown over the years and inspired a wealth of community events that annually draw thousands of visitors to Putnam.

> "My goal is to create a space that welcomes us as multidimensional individuals, where people feel they belong even if they are not on a straight and narrow path."

Carly's business has also evolved over the years, but a common theme and passion has always been community and its place in wellness and quality of life. "For me, that's the thing that hasn't changed," she says. "There's nothing more detrimental to health than isolation and loneliness and there's nothing more powerful in terms of healing than connection with other people."

Block 134 is the next stage in Carly's mission to offer community space that promotes health and wellbeing. "Last summer I decided to change my business model to an arts and wellness co-op because this space provided an opportunity to create something I had envisioned since I opened Silver Circle ten years ago." Silver Circle Gallery still exists but it is part of the broader enterprise.

"The creative process was how I was exploring well-being at the time," Carly explains. "I didn't envision having nutrition, massage therapy and yoga then, but I always felt like my mission was to provide resources for people to come together and heal and support one another." Her transition from art gallery to wellness center has mirrored her career evolution, personal experiences, and deeper purpose as an integrative health facilitator. In the beginning, Silver Circle was a space where Carly could be a working artist and offer art therapy, classes and workshops. "The gallery took on a life of its own," she admits. "I have no regrets but

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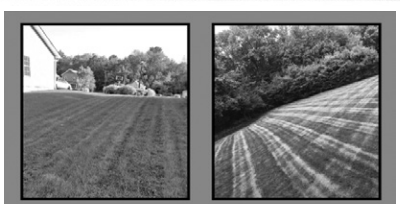

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my business had taken a retail avenue in a way I didn't anticipate."

With the inception of Block 134, things have come full circle. After studying for several years and becoming a certified practitioner, Carly now offers integrative functional nutrition services. She works closely with clients locally or remotely to restore health and address chronic disease factors at a root-cause level. This evidence-based practice offers a holistic approach and uses lifestyle changes and food as medicine to heal.

As Carly's interests shifted to include other health and wellness modalities, her entrepreneurial mind welcomed these fields into her business plan. Block 134 is a creative community venue and an arts & wellness cooperative. "We provide the opportunity for people to take their vision and share it," she says. "I like the cross pollination that happens with people and ideas, and when you limit that it closes many doors. There's so many people excited about so many different things!"

Carly sees Block 134 as an opportunity to explore. "My goal is to create a space that welcomes us as multidimensional individuals, where people feel they belong even if they are not on a straight and narrow path." According to Carly, research shows that community, purpose, relationships, and sense of belonging are the biggest indicators of health, happiness, and longevity. Block 134 is designed to be a healing, nourishing space that can foster these ideals.

As a cooperative, Block 134 allows instructors to offer different styles of yoga and meditation. Health practitioners can share the private services office to treat their patients. Artists can teach hands-on classes and workshops that range from drawing and painting to jewelry making. "I love the idea of shared and dynamic work space," she says. "It's very expensive to rent an office for part-time or per diem use. This makes it accessible for practitioners to establish themselves, where they can get more exposure and have a team environment but still be independent."

"Yoga has really taken off here," says Carly. "I try to get a mixture of styles but it's a co-op. I'm a facilitator and provide the space for someone who has a similar vision. I want it to be a platform to launch or grow a business." All yoga classes are open to the public on a drop-in basis. Carly hopes to attract more yoga and meditation instructors to offer classes, especially during the day. Wellness practitioners and artists can also rent the space to host a workshop for several hours. Block 134 will cross promote on social media and email to support marketing efforts.

Block 134 offers two art galleries. The P.S. Gallery features 8-week exhibits of work from Pomfret School's students, faculty, and guests. Silver Circle Gallery is a collective; artists rent space and change their work out whenever they like. Block 134 provides regular gallery hours and marketing support on the web and social media. Art classes, workshops and demos are also available. The opportunity to teach is open to any artist, not just those belonging to the collective.

The community lounge is cozy, comfortable and visually appealing. "I would love to see people up here treating it like a café," says Carly, "They can come and sit and work or bring food and drink and relax or have a meeting." She plans to offer food at some point, such as grab-and-go and healthy, allergy-friendly snacks in addition to tea and kombucha, but needs the audience to support that first.

Upcoming public events at Block 134 include themed Community Arts & Wellness Markets twice a month on Saturdays from 2 to 6PM. There will be featured artists, artisans, wellness administrators, holistic healers, and more. Vendors are urged to contact Block 134 for more information in participating. These markets are a great opportunity for local artists, artisans and practitioners to display or demonstrate their work and build connections.

Finally, the entire attractive setting of Block 134 can be rented for small weddings, private parties or corporate meetings. The venue holds up to 150 people (standing room) and catering options are available. "It's great to rent a space with the backdrop of art," Carly says. Plus, it's exposure for featured artists selling their work. Carly's future vision includes music events, food events with vendors, and wine tasting events. "We are working with a local writer who wants to do a poetry event paired with a winery offering tastings," says Carly. "It's about having experiences and working with other creatives in different genres and combining them–like having people writing poetry based on artwork. I like finding people who get inspired by the space and what's going on."

HOURS (gallery, retail & community lounge):
Thursday - Saturday 12:00am to 5:00pm, Sunday 12:00pm to 4:00pm, or by appointment.
For class schedules and other information, see www.block134.com
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Adriaenz Auctions Comes to Putnam

WEEKLY SALES IN A COMFORTABLE SETTING

There's a new kid on the block. Adriaenz Auctions. It's at 124 Pomfret Street in Putnam. The name is a punning mashup of the explorer Adriaen Block (of Block Island fame) and the auction block. Adriaenz' Owner John Gee riffed on Connecticut history as he showed me the rooms filled with, well, items with a history being readied for upcoming auctions.

BY CAROLINE SLOAT

"I love the stuff," he says. "Seeing it come in and go out." John came up with the idea for this new venture from his background as the owner of a vintage antique store. "When product overflowed and I had nowhere to store it, I rented 50,000 square feet of space and that got full. Liz asked, 'What are we going to do with it?'" Liz is John's girlfriend Elizabeth Rusconi, a social studies teacher at Bacon Academy. John's answer: "We'll have an auction and start selling."

Fast forward to June 2018 when they had found and purchased a large, empty building on Pomfret Street. The venture was launched and John and Liz went to work with John's Dad Frank Gee as "superintendent." Together, they accomplished a series of major renovations and improvements: insulating the outside walls; building interior walls, moving the garage doors, and adding LED lights. "The goal was to construct a comfortable place to attend an auction," says Liz. "While we were doing our research, we spent enough time in places that were draughty and falling apart. We didn't want that for our consignors or our customers."

Attention was given to technology, with the installation of a quality sound system, charging stations, and WiFi accessible by 100 users. It is possible to register on line and with a permanent bidding number, a person is always in the system. This works well for long-term customers and latecomers. "You can stroll in late, take a seat, and get into the auction right away as a recent customer did, acquiring an object he knew would his wife's collection. It did and she was thrilled." The two large-screen TVs mounted on the wall provide remote access to the auctions that are simulcast for absentee bidders.

There are currently two major interior spaces for goods and auctions. The auction hall, at the back of the building, is an area of 6,500 square feet, where curated items are displayed and sold. The curation is expert and thorough. This is not your grandfather's auction: all items are barcoded and photographed and uploaded to AuctionZip. Additions are made daily as the objects are cataloged and registered.

The first auction was held on October 27, 2018, followed by auctions most weekends since then. "The goal is to have an auction every Saturday," John notes, "but that depends on the estates that come in." When an additional area is ready, he plans to add a second weekly auction. Then the curated items and estates will be featured in the Saturday auctions and estates, and household liquidation auctions will be offered field-auction style on Wednesday evenings in the new room, the 5,000 square foot "Field House."

Adriaenz is open for auction previews on Fridays from 3:00 until 6:00 p.m. Beverages and snacks are available, and staff members give tours of the lots prepared for sale. On Saturday mornings, the hall opens for preview at 9:00, followed by the auction starting promptly at 10:00. Coffee and pastries are served, as well as hot dogs. With several auctioneers and the numbered lots listed on the AuctionZip site, the auctions are brisk. Items are either brought up for sale at the podium by runners or auctioned pallet-style in an adjoining room.

A point of pride is the "quick checkout." With 200 to 300 lots sold at each auction, this is possible because of the computerized registration system that expedites both the sale and checkout. Because every item is tagged, checkout for the entire auction can be completed in 15 to 20 minutes. After the auction there are six runners to assist customers with the boxing and removal of their purchases. Large items are easily moved through one of the loading docks or the drive-in bay

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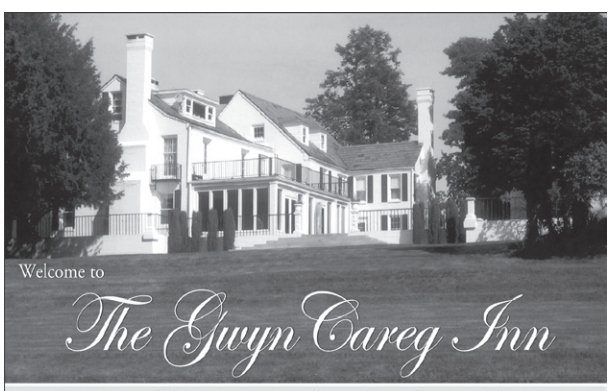
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added during the six-month renovation process.

Who attends the weekly auctions at Adriaenz? "Our goal is to sell to dealers for reselling, so that dealers can fill their shop. We are a fulfillment house for dealers, but the public is definitely welcome." The other part of the equation is locating stock for auction. Through the Adriaenz auction, John offers a service throughout eastern Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. He chose to locate his business in Putnam because of the demographics, including an aging population, which means that many households are downsizing. We "find items in houses, barns, and storage facilities, as well as estates that come our way," he says. There are three ways to liquidate the contents of a property with Adriaenz. One is an outright purchase. The second is advance cash toward the auction of the goods, either in-house or on-site. The third is an auction with the right to be present to refuse or accept the bids. John insists that he is not looking to establish a large retail shop. "The auctions enable us to cast a broader net," he says. "We are bringing in dealers and our plan for online exposure will permit us to do more."

"The amount of items and the interesting items we have found over the years has been very enlightening," John reminisces. He describes dealers whose "finds" in box lots have produced interesting resale stories. When I visited, preparations were underway for a themed weekend auction, "Vintage Sounds and Steampunk." Tables holding some 5,000 vinyl long-playing albums from the 60s and 70s (these LPs were in the process of being boxed in lots of 75 albums) were set up along the walls. Unique items included dozens of antique radios and 1,500 vintage radio tubes. John explains that "auctions such as this one are the only way to get these tubes to make an authentic restoration to your amplifier. The old tubes have proved hard to reproduce and are extensively collected." I met Vanessa von Oy, who was organizing and cataloging the lots. She was also photographing and uploading the images and their descriptions to the web, a job that she had no idea existed or that she would find so interesting. "I started as a runner, then began to set up, followed by the online work, and then bookkeeping. The more I got interested, the more responsibility came my way." For this auction, a knowledgeable expert was brought in to help prepare the lots for Vanessa to catalog. "Sets of items are efficient," she says. "We like to do sales with like items–old tubes, testing equipment, meters, scopes, vintage radios, vinyl, steampunk. That way, you get like-minded people with similar interests to generate bidding."

Adriaenz is a family affair. John's son Mission Gee works on purchasing and logistics; his daughters Jillian McCarthy and Mallory Sherman work as clerks and registrars. Django, the family dog, also has a role in hospitality: he really loves that hot dogs are on the menu. And the name of the business? Adriaenz harkens back to our state's history evoking Block's exploration of the Connecticut River in the early 1600s. "When we bought this property, a parcel that goes all the way down to the river, we also got our own landing," John reflected. "Looking for stuff to sell, going out on calls, seeing it come in and go out–every day is a new adventure." That's as true for Liz, John, his family and staff, as it is for those who go to the auctions.

To reach John Gee when considering consignment:
(860) 207-4452 or jgee.img@gmail.com
For the auction schedule:
Facebook: www.facebook.com/Adriaenzauction
For the weekly listing of auction lots:
www.auctionzip.com/CT-Auctioneers/824802.html

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Flowers and Vegetables at Symphony Flower Farm

Grown by the Day Program at Northeast Placement Services

Symphony Flower Farm is the perfect source for seasonal plants, fresh flowers and vegetables, and dried flower wreaths and other decor and gift items. There's a lot of activity in the NEPS complex at 312 Route 169, surrounding the South Woodstock Post Office. NEPS-Northeast Placement Services-runs day programs for their participants there, complementing residential services for the people it supports. Each program, horticulture included, is designed to match the agency's mission: "To provide integrated placement opportunities and services for people with intellectual disabilities so that they are successful, valued members of the community."

BY CAROLINE SLOAT

Cheryl Fogg, Director of Day Programs, met me at a busy time when vehicles bringing participants into the day programs were pulling in. The campus tour began with a visit to the greenhouse, a warm shelter with a view of the snow-covered garden beds. Adjacent to Route 169 is the new Symphony Flower Farm retail space (formerly Sawmill Pottery now relocated to Putnam), which is the outlet for some of the bounty of vegetables and flowers that are grown each year. The shop is open from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday; with expanded open hours beginning in the future.

The greenhouse, a 28-foot by 48-foot wooden and steel-framed structure, was built in 2016 and thanks to additional fundraising, it is now equipped with a heater that will extend the 2019 growing season. "Participants are looking forward to starting seedlings and the cold weather crops that can be planted directly in the ground: kale, Swiss chard, arugula, and lettuce, lots of lettuces," Cheryl observed. These seeds were planted the first week in March. The direct-sown greens share space in the greenhouse with half a dozen benches-made on-site utilizing donations from Morse Lumber and Joly Concrete. Building the benches provided great indoor work for the grounds and landscaping crews, some of whom work for area businesses and individuals who have contracts for the mowing season.

"We try to give everyone a chance in the horticulture program, growing, arranging flowers for sale, harvesting, watering, weeding." Cheryl also described a bonus that became apparent almost as soon as the greenhouse came into use. "Light therapy. With the sunlight streaming through the roof on bright days in the early spring when it's too cold to spend much time outdoors, the greenhouse is great therapy."

Laura St. Jean coordinates the horticulture program. Laura has a degree in horticulture from the University of Connecticut. She has vast experience that includes working at area nurseries, growers and floral businesses before joining NEPS five years ago. Cheryl, who has known Laura for many years, appreciates her deep knowledge of the field and how generously she shares it. There are about forty-five people in the day programs at NEPS and they work in groups of three or four with a staff member, or as it often works out, two staff for six or seven participants. "Learning about the greenhouse and garden processes are lovely additions to the program. People we never thought would be interested in getting their hands dirty really enjoy it. Because the vegetables are grown for the culinary program, the workers in the horticultural program are able to buy lunches that use 'their' produce on the days when it is prepared. It's a lovely circle."

Produce, plants and fresh flowers have been offered for sale seasonally at a farm market in front of the Post

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Office building. It received a lot of traffic and was "very successful there." This summer the market will be moved to the new Symphony Flower Farm retail space.

Among the flowers grown are echinacea, dahlias, peonies, sunflowers, amaranthus, zinnias and sweet peas. Artemisia is also grown for drying. "We could probably have the whole place planted with gardens, but we have to leave room for parking for Woodstock Fair, which is another source of income," Cheryl observed.

A cooler for cut flowers is on the wish list. Fundraising and community outreach have been launched for Symphony to acquire one in anticipation of the upcoming wedding season. Refrigeration will provide more flexibility for storing arrangements made for special occasions as well as offering walk-in customers a wide variety of unique fresh flowers. Over the course of the year, teams were at work creating nature inspired art. Field trips were taken to forage twigs, moss, and fungi to incorporate in their work. Evergreen wreaths, kissing balls, and holiday decorations are offered during the Christmas season and the shop will remain open year round. "Our goal is to have the majority of our inventory made on-site by our participants."

Laura St Jean, who coordinates the day program in horticulture, collaborates with a NEPS participant on a wreath that will be displayed and sold at Symphony Flower Shop.

When I visited the flower shop, Laura was working with three participants. One was cutting dried plant material to the prescribed length. Another was creating wreaths using these cuttings with Laura's guidance and support. On the worktable was also a pile of fresh birch twigs that they would transform into wreaths. The shop was bright with glittering trees prepared to decorate the Knights of Columbus Hall for a dance planned for March (Disability Awareness Month). Walls were hung with hand-made wreaths and tables were stocked with wooden items, winter projects in collaboration with the work crew. These included candle and bud vase holders as well as whimsical wooden owls and birdhouses.

The vegetables grown on site are primarily for the culinary program. The kitchen is in operation on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays preparing breakfast and lunch for employees and participants. The food is reasonably priced and the program is self-sustaining. It is not licensed as a restaurant, so it is not open to the public, but it functions as an educational program in which the participants learn about choosing a recipe and buying ingredients to prepare a meal. "They are learning skills that they can use in their own apartments and group homes." Cheryl explains. They also learn proper kitchen sanitation, such as washing dishes and general cleanup. The goal of each individualized program at NEPS is to build trust, respect, and dignity for participants through work experiences, residential support and retirement and leisure programs.

NEPS is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1986 to provide quality, innovative support services to people with intellectual disabilities. Agencies such as NEPS are affiliated with the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Every participant receives funding from the State of Connecticut and may choose among living, work and day programs. "They can stay as long as they want and if and when they are ready to move on, they receive assistance in selecting something different." NEPS' five homes, each with three residents, are staffed around the clock. Because the State of Connecticut has announced that it will cease to operate group homes, the trend is to tum to private agencies and a number are expecting to expand. "The starting wage has recently been increased with increased funding from DDS, but the participants lives are in our hands and our dedicated staff deserve to be compensated appropriately and we are not quite there yet."

NEPS employees have made a positive difference for many participants. Cheryl explains that some have become their own advocates through their experiences. As the staff gets to know the participants they are able to observe and help develop interests. An example is the art program. One participant surprised staff with her ability to create vibrant paintings of flowers. A man assigned to the work crew, who moved into the art program loves music and puts a CD into the player each morning when he arrives. He also loves to weave and he''s able to do that in his down time. "We have wonderful employees, people who care," Cheryl concluded.

NEPS has grown from sharing the post office building into adjacent space to expand the day programs, including the new home for Symphony. Begun in very tight quarters, the flower shop now has room to spread out. All are welcomed to see and shop in this new work and display space and register for workshops open to the public.

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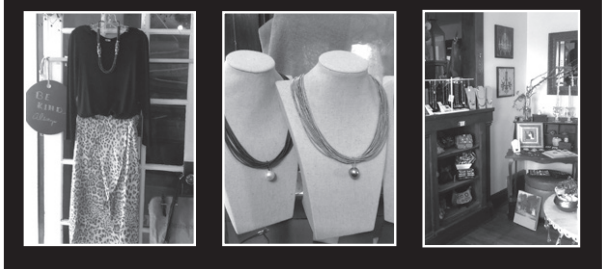
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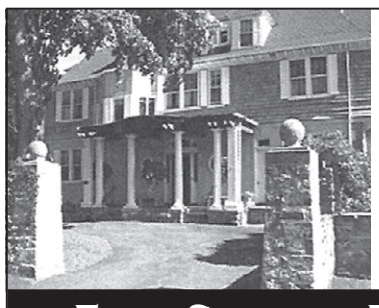
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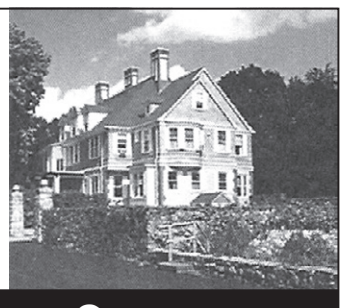
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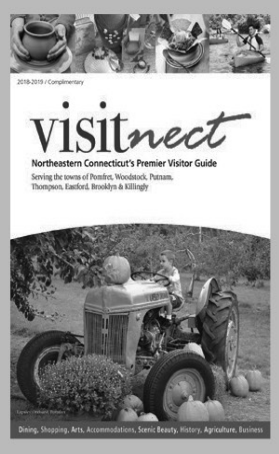

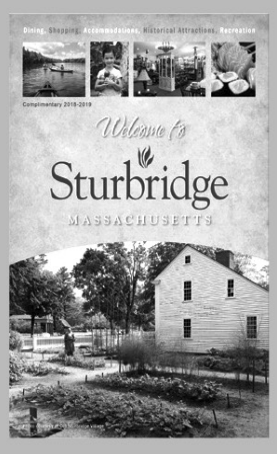

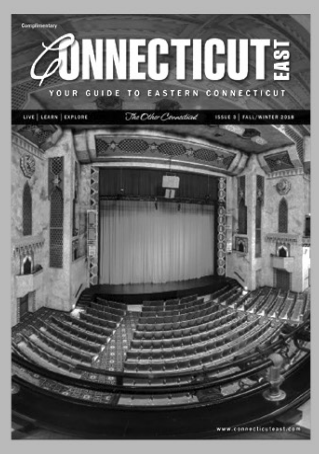

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